

Acupressurist — Caugnga'istaq

UNA ARNAQ CAUGNGA'ISTAQ. – THIS WOMAN IS AN ACUPRESSURIST.



Photo: Alutiiq Elder and traditional healer, Mary Peterson.

Although many people think of acupressure as an Asian science, healers in societies around the world use their hands to restore health to the sick by applying gentle, carefully directed pressure. This pressure promotes blood circulation, stimulates the production of hormones, relieves tension, and reduces pain, helping the body to heal.

In Alutiiq society, acupressure was once an important form of traditional medicine practiced by village healers. Women trained in the art of bleeding, the use of plant medicines, and midwifery were also acupressurists. They used their hands to feel illness and to move it from the body with directed pressure and massage.

The Alutiiq word for an acupressurist, caugnga'istaq, comes from the word for a pulse. According to Elders, there were certain points on the body where the caugnga'istaq would feel a patient's pulse to both diagnose and treat illness. Some of the commonly manipulated pulse points included the temple, the collarbone, and the ankles. If a person's pulse felt faint in a certain area, the acupressurist might perform a holding technique to restore blood flow or choose a bloodletting or herbal treatment to promote healing.